

They Were All Amazed!

December 23

Almighty and ever-living God,
as we see how the Nativity of your Son
according to the flesh draws near,
we pray that to us, your unworthy servants,
mercy may flow from your Word,
who chose to become flesh of the Virgin Mary
and establish among us his dwelling,
Jesus Christ our Lord.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit
One God, for ever and ever.

Read Luke 1:57-66

There was a word in this morning's Gospel which I repeated over the last few days. First of all, I asked if you were amazed. Yesterday, we reflected on how amazed Mary was. Today, everyone was amazed. Amazed! Significant things were happening, unusual things, and surprising things.

They gathered on the eighth day for His circumcision. This was an ancient tradition. That eighth day was stepping outside of the regular time, to reflect on and insert oneself into the covenant which was beyond time. This is a tradition that has carried over to today, but most Catholics are unaware that when we are at Sunday Mass, we are not on the seventh day of the week; we are on the eighth day of the week. I often ask Catholics if they have heard of this eighth day, but nobody has heard of it.

Here is a little secret. Traditional baptismal fonts have eight sides. This is an insertion of the eighth day – outside of time, a moment of wonder, a moment of grace, a moment of awe. This is not our expectation, this is not what we looked for; this is not anything that we even imagined. “No eye has seen, no ear ever heard, what God has planned for those who love him.” This is a foreshadowing of the release from death for all of creation, on the day of the resurrection. This is a day outside of time.

This birth of John the Baptist, the last prophet of the Old Testament, is a miracle. He awakens a dead womb and he comes to us, to call us to awaken a dead world. What the angel in the temple had bound up in Zechariah, now this birth opens up, and Zechariah begins to speak. It is an extraordinary reversal of expectations. Everybody is amazed. We should name him Zechariah. “No, his name is John,” and they were all stunned. What then shall this child be? They had no idea.

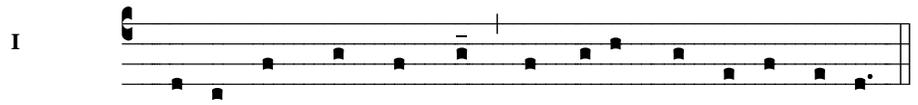
There needs to be in us, a bit of that wonder, surprise, and reverence, for each other. Original sin makes us fundamentally selfish; we always have to fight against it. Often when you are with your spouse or with your neighbor, it is about your own values, your own needs, your own expectations, your own hopes and dreams. This may be new, but your spouse is not there to fulfill your expectations. As the people of Elizabeth and Zechariah's time were supposed to receive this great mystery in wonder and awe; we are supposed to be doing this with each other as well. I am not here to fulfill your expectations either; I am here to give you the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And, that may not be what you need to hear, or want to hear, or hope to hear, but it is what God wants you to hear. It is what God wants me to hear. It is supposed to be a spiritual surprise. John did not fulfill anyone's expectations, and neither will we.

We are approaching a great mystery. Tomorrow night, we will enter into a celebration of the Incarnation of the Word of God. You and I have no idea yet, still; we keep doing this year after year after year because we still have not gotten it. And maybe this year, maybe this Christmas, we will have a glimpse; a glimpse of heaven, a glimpse of mystery, a glimpse of wonder and awe. Maybe we will fall silent; be reverent, and hopeful and joyful. It is the appropriation of a great and holy mystery, and we can only really scratch at the surface and wonder at what God is doing in us, and for us. “And they were all amazed, and they said, ‘What then shall this child be?’” They had no idea and neither do we. So, wait for it. It is Jesus who is coming. The Creator of the universe is going to enter our lives as a little child,

and the moment of birth is a time of wonder and grace. Enjoy it. Revel in it. Try to understand it, but it is not about understanding; it is first of all, about love. God first loved us, so that we might slowly but surely, learn to love Him and one another.

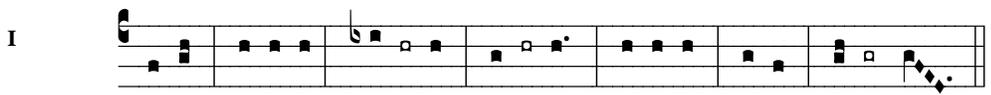
Psalm 25:4-5, 8-9. 10 & 14

Ad te, Domine, levavi



Lift up your heads and see; your redemption is near at hand.

2 * 2 4



2 2 4
 Your ways, / O / **LORD**, make / **known** (to) me; * / -- / *teach* me / **your** paths,
 2 4
 -- / Guide me in your / **truth** and / **teach** me, * for you are / *God* my / **sav**-ior.

2 2 4
 Good and / -- / **up**-right / **is** (the) **LORD**, * thus he shows / *sin*-ners / the way.
 2 4
 -- / He guides the / **hum**(ble) to / **justice**, * and he teaches the / *hum*-ble / his way.

2
 All the / paths of the Lord are / **kind**(ness) and / **con**(stan)cy * toward those who keep his
 coven- / ant and / **his** (de)crees.
 -- / The friendship of the Lord is with / **those who** / **fear** him, * and his covenant, for / *their in*-
 / **struc**-tion.